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SCHOOL ATTENDANCE OF CHILDREN FOURTEEN AND FIFTEEN YEARS OF AGE IN VIRGINIA IN 1925

By SARA A. BROWN

ARE the children of Virginia who leave school as soon as the law permits, to spend their time in idleness or in regular and lawful employment, far enough advanced in the grades to justify no further attendance upon school? If so, the people of the State may well be satisfied with two things; if not, grave responsibility rests upon them. The two things affecting children who leave school are (1) there is no educational requirements either for leaving or securing a work permit, and (2) the compulsory school attendance period ends with the fourteenth birthday. Only five other states permit the low standard of this combination.

According to the school census taken, for the most part, during May and June, 1925, there were 106,613 children in Virginia enumerated at 14 and 15 years of age. Of these, 56,440 were 14 and 50,173 were 15 years of age. Seventy-nine per cent of these 14 and 15 year old children were enumerated in the "Counties" and twenty-one per cent in the "Cities." Practically these same percentages obtain in this age group when we consider separately the children of each age and each race. In the counties there were 44,557 who were 14, and 39,451 who were 15 years, making a total of 84,008; 57,627 of them were white, and 26,381 were negro. In the cities there were 11,883 who were 14, and 10,722 who were 15 years, a total of 22,605; 15,650 white, and 6,955 negro—a grand total of 106,613.

Children were here counted as 14 or 15 years of age when they were so recorded in the census or the teacher's register. The school census, taken every five years, does not show the date of a child's birth, but instead the "attained age" stated in years as of September 1st of the census year. Without the date of birth there is no basis for computing the children's ages in years, months and days, so we took their ages in attained years as shown by the census.

During the months of May and June, 1925, at the close of the school year, all the schools in Virginia made annual reports to the State Superintendent of Public Instruction. These reports give the ages and grades of children enrolled. Compiled by the State Superintendent of Public Instruction and published in his Annual Report, is an

age-grade-distribution of the children. It shows the grades attained by 83,042 children who were enrolled in the schools as 14 and 15 years of age. Of these there were:

In 1st, 2nd and 3rd grades	8,335 or 10.0 per cent
In 4th grade	8,903 or 10.7 per cent
In 5th grade	11,821 or 14.2 per cent
In 6th grade	15,422 or 18.6 per cent
In 7th grade	15,877 or 19.1 per cent
In 8th grade	10,686 or 12.9 per cent
In 9th or above grades	11,998 or 14.4 per cent

This means that of the children enrolled in the public schools in 1925:

20.7 per cent were below the 5th grade
34.9 per cent were below the 6th grade
53.5 per cent were below the 7th grade
72.6 per cent were below the 8th grade
85.5 per cent were below the 9th grade
14.5 per cent were in the 9th grade or above

Considering separately the grades attained by children of the two ages we find that among those 14 years of age:

24.3 per cent were below the 5th grade
40.4 per cent were below the 6th grade
60.4 per cent were below the 7th grade.
79.1 per cent were below the 8th grade
91.0 per cent were below the 9th grade
9.0 per cent were in the 9th grade or above

Among those 15 years of age we find:

16.4 per cent were below the 5th grade
28.3 per cent were below the 6th grade
44.8 per cent were below the 7th grade
64.5 per cent were below the 8th grade
78.6 per cent were below the 9th grade
21.3 per cent were in the 9th grade or above

The form of the report of the State Superintendent makes it easy to determine the grade distribution for children of any age by counties and cities, for white and negro children.

IN THE COUNTIES:

Of the white children 14 years of age in the counties:

19.4 per cent were below the 5th grade
34.7 per cent were below the 6th grade
57.2 per cent were below the 7th grade
80.3 per cent were below the 8th grade
92.3 per cent were below the 9th grade
7.5 per cent were in the 9th grade or above

Of the negro children 14 years of age in the counties:

49.6 per cent were below the 5th grade
72.9 per cent were below the 6th grade
90.8 per cent were below the 7th grade
98.9 per cent were below the 8th grade
99.7 per cent were below the 9th grade
.3 per cent were in the 9th grade or above

Of the white children 15 years of age in the counties:

11.2 per cent were below the 5th grade
22.2 per cent were below the 6th grade
40.6 per cent were below the 7th grade
64.7 per cent were below the 8th grade
80.5 per cent were below the 9th grade
19.5 per cent were in the 9th grade or above

Of the negro children 15 years of age in the counties:

41.6 per cent were below the 5th grade
62.1 per cent were below the 6th grade
83.0 per cent were below the 7th grade
96.9 per cent were below the 8th grade
99.2 per cent were below the 9th grade
.7 per cent were in the 9th grade or above

IN THE CITIES:

Of the white children 14 years of age in the cities:

5.1 per cent were below the 5th grade
12.0 per cent were below the 6th grade
25.1 per cent were below the 7th grade
44.8 per cent were below the 8th grade
71.4 per cent were below the 9th grade
28.6 per cent were in the 9th grade or above

Of the negro children 14 years of age in the cities:

22.2 per cent were below the 5th grade
40.8 per cent were below the 6th grade
60.6 per cent were below the 7th grade
77.7 per cent were below the 8th grade
92.8 per cent were below the 9th grade
7.2 per cent were in the 9th grade or above

Of the white children 15 years of age in the cities:

1.8 per cent were below the 5th grade
4.6 per cent were below the 6th grade
11.3 per cent were below the 7th grade
24.1 per cent were below the 8th grade
45.7 per cent were below the 9th grade
54.3 per cent were in the 9th grade or above

Of the negro children 15 years of age in the cities:

11.0 per cent were below the 5th grade
24.0 per cent were below the 6th grade
39.7 per cent were below the 7th grade
58.9 per cent were below the 8th grade
80.0 per cent were below the 9th grade
20.0 per cent were in the 9th grade or above

Children who start to school at the age of six or seven years and complete one grade each year are in the 8th or 9th grade when they are 14 years of age, and in the 9th or 10th grade when they are 15 years of age. This is the standard generally accepted by the National Education Association, with the statistical age computed in years, months and days. Interpreting the census or the school age of a child as his statistical age, according to this generally accepted standard, among the children 14 years of age in Virginia, 79.1 per cent were below the 8th grade, in or above which children of that age belong; and among those 15 years old, 78.6 per cent were below the 9th grade, in or above which children of *that* age belong.

In certain sections of the State it is recognized that a large number of the negro children have not made the same progress as the white children of the same neighborhood. In the counties 80.3 per cent of the white children and 98.9 per cent of the negro children, 14 years of age, were below 8th grade; while 80.5 per cent of the white and 99.2 per cent of the negro children, 15 years of age, were below 9th grade. In the cities 44.8 per cent of the white and 77.7 per cent of the negro children, 14 years of age, were below 8th grade; while 45.7 per cent of the white and 80.0 per cent of the negro children, 15 years of age, were below 9th grade.

In Virginia children may legally leave school as early as the fourteenth birthday irrespective of the grade they have attained. No one really knows how many children 14 or 15 years of age at any given time have dropped out. The school census, taken at practically the same time as the annual reports were made to the State Superintendent during May and June, 1925, enumerates 10,281 children 14 years of age and 13,290 children 15 years of age *more* than the age-grade-distribution of enrolled chil-

dren shows. This makes a total of 23,571 *more* of these ages on the census than on the annual school reports. In other words, 22.1 per cent of the census children of both these ages were not in the age-grade-distribution of enrolled children; of those 14 years of age 18.2 per cent; and of those 15 years of age 26.3 per cent.

The largest proportion of this difference, 23,571, or 82.6 per cent were reported in the counties and 17.3 per cent in the cities. The census excess over the enrollment in all counties was 19,478; 8,479 were 14 years, and 10,999 were 15 years of age; 11,863 white, and 7,615 negro. The census excess, in all cities was 4,093; distributed by ages, 1,802 were 14 years, and 2,291 15 years of age; distributed by races, 2,431 white, and 1,662 negro—a grand total of 23,571.

Expressed another way, according to the reports of the census and the number in the age-grade-distribution in the counties, 18.4 per cent of the white, and 24.0 per cent of the negro children 14 years of age; 25.3 per cent of the white, and 33.6 per cent of the negro children, 15 years of age, did not enter school. In the cities, 15.2 per cent of the white and 15.1 per cent of the negro children, 14 years of age; 14.6 per cent of the white, and 33.4 per cent of the negro children, 15 years of age, did not enter. From this it is evident that the percentage of loss for children of both 14 and 15 years of age and for both races, white and negro, is larger for schools in the counties than in the cities.

In October, 1925, at our request, the State Superintendent of Public Instruction suggested five counties which he considered representative and we made a limited inquiry in three of them in order to determine the grades of the children 14 and 15 years old who had left school. With the assistance of the county superintendents of schools we selected six school districts and parts of two others, all among the best and most centralized schools in these counties. We undertook to trace all the children enumerated as 14 or 15 years of age by these districts in the school census of 1925. The names and ages were secured from the census in the offices of county superintendents and in addition the name, age and grade of each child enrolled as 14 or 15 years of age during the first four weeks of the fall term, 1925. With these lists in hand we went to twenty-two schools where the children belonged and with the assistance of principals, teachers and sometimes pupils, found out whether or not these children were attending school, the grades they were in, and in case they were enrolled in these schools, we noted their attendance and the causes for any non-attendance during the fall of 1925. In case no one knew the grades of children who had left school, we consulted the annual reports of various districts in the offices of the county superintendents for information on this point. The inquiry was confined to white children.

We found in all 749 children of whom 377 were 14 and 372 were 15 years of age. There were 444 of them or 59.2 per cent attending school; 278 or 37.1 per cent had left school; 27 or 3.6 per cent were either unknown or not located. Practically all of these 27 were in the larger school districts and those with whom we conferred were not acquainted with them. In this connection it should be stated that after a child passes his fourteenth birthday and drops out, the school may soon lose all track of him.

Grouped according to age, of the 377 children 14 years old 218 or 57.8 per cent were attending school; 142 or 37.7 per cent had left school; and 17 or 4.5 per cent were either unknown or not located. Of the 372 children 15 years of age 226 or 60.8 per cent were attending school; 136 or 36.6 per cent had left school; 10 or 2.6 per cent were either unknown or not located.

Out of the 278 children who had left school we secured for 229 either the record or a statement of the grade each child was in at the time he dropped out. Of the 229 there were:

21 or 9.2 per cent below 4th grade
65 or 28.4 per cent below 5th grade
117 or 51.1 per cent below 6th grade
154 or 67.3 per cent below 7th grade
186 or 81.2 per cent below 8th grade
207 or 90.4 per cent below 9th grade
22 or 9.6 per cent in 9th grade or above

More than one-fourth, 28.4 per cent, left school before they reached the 5th grade; slightly more than one-half, 51.1 per cent, before they reached 6th grade; and more than four-fifths, 81.2 per cent, before they reached 8th grade.

Of the 444 children 14 and 15 years of age attending school in these same districts there were:

12 or 2.7 per cent below 4th grade
28 or 6.1 per cent below 5th grade
83 or 18.7 per cent below 6th grade
127 or 28.1 per cent below 7th grade
194 or 43.7 per cent below 8th grade
285 or 64.2 per cent below 9th grade
159 or 35.8 per cent in the 9th grade or above

Of those attending school less than one-sixteenth, 6.1 per cent were below 5th grade; less than one-fifth, 18.7 per cent, below 6th grade; slightly more than one-fourth, 28.1 per cent below 7th; while a few more than two-fifths, 43.7 per cent, were below 8th grade. It is evident that 14- and 15-year-old children in the lower grades drop out in larger proportions than those in the more advanced grade.

Many children leave school because they become discouraged in their educational progress. A loss of school time interferes with progress. Children who are regular enough in school attendance to reach the more advanced grades by the time they are 14 years of age have the advantage of a more or less sustained *interest* in school life, and at the same time realize they cannot make their credits and merit promotion unless they are reasonably regular in attendance. Many children capable of making creditable progress in school are so irregular in attendance during the early grades that by the time they reach the age of 14 years, or even before, they become seriously handicapped, discouraged and drop out. Many, perhaps, drop out simply because no one is sufficiently interested to keep them in school beyond their fourteenth birthday.

The attendance of these same 14- and 15-year-old children during the fall of 1925 sheds a certain amount of light on the question of regular and irregular attendance in this age group and the relation to grade standing. We secured attendance records for 417 of these 14- and 15-year-old children; 108 or 25.9 per cent had perfect attendance during the fall up to the time the records were taken; 140 or 33.6 per cent lost school for work; 162 or 40.5 per cent lost school time for all causes other than work. The time covered averaged 47.8 school days or a fraction of one day more than the first nine and one-half weeks of the term. The 140 who lost school time for work averaged 19.3 school days, a fraction of one day less than four weeks out of the first nine and one-half weeks of school, 40.3 per cent of the time their schools had been in session. The 169 who lost for all causes other than work averaged 4.2 school days, a fraction of one day less than one week out of the first nine and one-half weeks of school, 9 per cent of the time their schools had been in session.

The 108 children with *perfect attention* were distributed among the grades as follows:

Below 4th grade	0 or .0 per cent
Below 5th grade	1 or .9 per cent
Below 6th grade	8 or 7.4 per cent
Below 7th grade	13 or 12.0 per cent
Below 8th grade	25 or 21.1 per cent
Below 9th grade	49 or 45.4 per cent
In 9th grade or above	59 or 54.6 per cent

The 140 children 14 and 15 years of age who had *lost school time for work* were distributed among the grades as follows:

Below 4th grade	7 or 5.0 per cent
Below 5th grade	21 or 15.0 per cent
Below 6th grade	55 or 39.3 per cent
Below 7th grade	75 or 53.6 per cent
Below 8th grade	92 or 65.7 per cent
Below 9th grade	117 or 83.6 per cent
In 9th grade or above	23 or 16.4 per cent

The 169 of the same ages who *lost school time for all causes other than work* were distributed among the grades as follows:

Below 4th grade	6 or 3.9 per cent
Below 5th grade	7 or 4.1 per cent
Below 6th grade	17 or 10.1 per cent
Below 7th grade	31 or 18.4 per cent
Below 8th grade	66 or 39.1 per cent
Below 9th grade	103 or 60.9 per cent
In 9th grade or above	66 or 39.9 per cent

In grade attainment children with perfect attendance held first honors; those who lost school time for causes other than work, second; while those who lost school time for work were at the greatest disadvantage. For instance, of the children with perfect attendance less than 1 per cent were below 5th grade; while 4.1 per cent of those who lost for causes other than work, and 15.0 per cent of those who lost for work were below 5th grade. For the children below 8th grade the percentages in the same order were 23.1, 39.1 and 65.7. In the 9th grade or above, we found 54.6 per cent of the children with perfect attendance; 39.9 per cent of those who lost school time for all causes other than work; and only 16.4 per cent of those who lost for work. As usual, work which interferes with attendance upon school and apparently affecting grade standing, seems to demand a heavy toll. In this connection it would be well to bear in mind that the 14- and 15-year-old children who lost school time for work missed a fraction of one day less than four weeks, while those who lost for all other causes missed but a fraction of one day less than *one* week, out of the first nine and one-half weeks of school.

Not any of these children were engaged in work requiring employment certificates under the child labor law. In the main, they worked on farms or in rural neighborhoods where there were no industries, in orchards, corn, cotton and peanuts.

EMPLOYMENT CERTIFICATES:

There is very valuable information on the grades attained by children who secure employment certificates under the law in the office of the State Bureau of Labor and Industry. Through the courtesy of the Commissioner of Labor we secured *grade* information from the employment certificates granted to 14- and 15-year-old children in three representative industrial cities during the twelve months from October 1, 1924 to September 30, 1925. All the certificates were issued to white children for *inside* employment. The character of the work and reports subsequent to granting the certificates lead us to believe that the majority of the children had left school although no official records to that effect were available.

In these three industrial cities school officers had issued employment certificates for inside work during the one year to 379 children 14 years, and 321 children 15 years of age, 700 in all.

The 379 who were 14 years of age were distributed among the grades as follows:

Below 4th grade	39 or 10.4 per cent
Below 5th grade	97 or 25.7 per cent
Below 6th grade	179 or 47.3 per cent
Below 7th grade	272 or 71.8 per cent
Below 8th grade	339 or 89.5 per cent
Below 9th grade	364 or 96.1 per cent
In 9th grade or above	15 or 3.9 per cent

The 321 who were 15 years old were distributed among the grades as follows:

Below 4th grade	27 or 8.4 per cent
Below 5th grade	65 or 20.2 per cent
Below 6th grade	122 or 37.7 per cent
Below 7th grade	199 or 61.7 per cent
Below 8th grade	265 or 82.3 per cent
Below 9th grade	331 or 93.8 per cent
In 9th grade or above	19 or 5.9 per cent

The Twenty-seventh Annual Report of the Bureau of Labor and Industry for the year ending September 30, 1924, in Tables 3 and 4, pages 103-4, shows among other things the age and grade of children granted employment certificates, evidence of age used in issuing certificates, age, color, and sex of children working in mercantile and manufacturing establishments. Each time a child changed employment he was required to secure a new certificate. Therefore, these data contain duplications in the number of such children as the data were compiled on the number of certificates rather than the number of children.

Altogether 2,455 employment certificates were issued to children 14 and 15 years of age working in mercantile and manufacturing establishments in the year ending September 30, 1925. Only 121 of these were issued to negro children. The children for whom the 2,455 certificates were issued were distributed among the grades as follows:

Below 4th grade	221 or 9.0 per cent
Below 5th grade	565 or 23.0 per cent
Below 6th grade	1,038 or 42.2 per cent
Below 7th grade	1,578 or 63.5 per cent
Below 8th grade	2,060 or 83.5 per cent
Below 9th grade	2,156 or 87.8 per cent
In 9th grade or above	298 or 12.0 per cent

In the "evidence of age" used in issuing employment certificates less than one-fourth, 23.7 per cent, were issued on evidence furnished in "affidavits," which among other things, included the school record of age. Evidences used were as follows:

Birth record	250
Baptismal record	84
Bible	751
Insurance policy	676
Others	13
Affidavits: School records and physician's certificate of physical age	681

SUMMARY:

The 1925 school census enumerated 73,277 white children 14 and 15 years of age. The age-grade-distribution, for practically the same time, showed 32,518 14 years, and 26,465 15 years of age enrolled, a total of 58,983. There was a loss of 14,294 children 14 or 15 years of age.

Of these 14 years of age, 80.3 per cent in the counties and 44.8 per cent in the cities had not finished the elementary course of study prescribed by the State Board of Education, which is the 7th grade. Of those 15 years old, 64.7 per cent in the counties and 24.1 per cent in the cities had not finished 7th grade.

In the fall of 1925, in twenty-two *county* schools there were 749 children 14 and 15 years old; 59.2 per cent attending school; 37.1 per cent having left school; and 3.6 per cent whom we failed to locate. Of those who had left school 81.2 per cent had not finished 7th grade, while those attending school 43.7 per cent had not finished 7th grade.

The attendance records for 417 children 14 and 15 years, showed 25.9 per cent had perfect attendance during the first 47.8 school days in the fall of 1925; 33.6 per cent lost an average of four weeks of school time for work; 40.5 per cent, an average of less than one week for all causes other than work.

Of the children with perfect attendance 23.1 per cent had not finished 7th grade, while 65.7 per cent of those who lost for work, and 39.9 per cent of those who lost for all other causes had not finished 7th grade.

In *cities* where employment certificates were issued for regular and lawful work during one year 89.5 per cent of those 14 years old and 82.3 per cent of those 15 years old to whom permits for inside work were issued, had not finished 7th grade.

This is not a good showing. The whole situation would be improved by the enactment and enforcement of a compulsory school attendance law for every child under sixteen years of age unless he has completed the first seven grades of the public school course. Such a law would be of service to children whose parents, while not opposed to sending them to school, are careless in seeing to it that the children attend regularly enough to enable them successfully to complete the 7th grade by the time they are fourteen or fifteen years of age. At the same time it would insure diligence on the part of parents and children for regular attendance if they expect to be released from school at the age of fourteen years in order to go to work.

If Virginia does not feel herself able at this time to establish and enforce a 7th grade standard for all children under 16 years, she might begin with a lower standard and climb up gradually. A large number of children 14 and 15 years of age are dropping out of school without as much as a 5th grade education. If she is not able to go higher she might begin with a 5th grade standard or even a 4th.

In the preparation of this pamphlet, that you might have the value of this information, it has been necessary for us to expend time, effort, and money from very limited funds. We have no endowment, subsidy, or source of income other than the gifts of interested people. A voluntary subscription from you at this time would make it possible for us to extend the distribution of this and other pamphlets.

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